

# ***FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET***

**Meeting Date:** July 10, 2014

**Agenda Item:** 2014 Upland Game Bird Quotas and Limits and Sage Grouse Season Dates and Closures

**Division:** Wildlife

**Action Needed:** Final Action

**Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 30 minutes

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## **Background**

Upland game bird seasons for 2014 were approved in February. Other considerations include bag and possession limits; and permit quotas for turkeys. Adaptive Harvest Management for sage grouse assesses populations and bag limits. The Management Plan and Conservation Strategies for Sage Grouse recommends a conservative two-bird bag limit if average lek counts are below the long-term average of about 30 males/lek on nearly 90 pre-selected leks. The sage grouse plan prescribes season closures based on average lek counts at least 45% below LTA over three years. Heightened awareness of sage grouse, and potential habitat impacts from energy development, resulted in the Commission adopting a conservative two-bird bag limit in 2007, a year of above-average lek counts (33.6 males/lek). The two-bird bag limit has been maintained through 2013. Continuing a downward trend from the recent high in 2009 (23.3), the 2013 lek statewide average was 14.9 males/lek, 48% below LTA.

The 2014 statewide lek count was 13.1 males/lek, about 54% below the LTA of 28.4 males/lek (1980-2013). This furthers a statewide downward trend for the second consecutive year at or below 45% below the LTA. When separated by hunt management zones the Commission adopted in February 2014, only one management zone has been at or below 45% below the LTA for three consecutive years. FWP originally proposed closing the season statewide. Analysis of final summarized lek data and public comments prompted proposed adjustments to include closing all of one harvest management zone and parts of two others to address low numbers and hunter shifts to isolated open areas and to ease communication/closure descriptions (see supplemental map). To address potential hunter shift to remaining open areas, a proposed shortened season would run Sept. 1–Sept. 30. In light of these proposed closures and shortened season and recognizing limited population-scale impacts from hunting, no bag limit changes are proposed.

FWP also proposes re-opening criteria that includes: 1) lek counts above the 45% closure criteria for three consecutive years; OR 2) a single year with lek counts above the LTA. Either would prompt a re-opening proposal and/or potential season adjustments. No other changes are proposed for other upland game bird bag, possession limits and permit quotas. Shaded areas above are changes from the original adoption.

## **Public Involvement Process & Results**

Public comment ended June 23 with comments forwarded to the Commission. There was a significant volume with a primary theme being opposition to a full closure but some tolerance/support for other restrictions. Comments also emphasized the minimal impact to populations from hunting vs. habitat loss.

## **Alternatives and Analysis**

This proposal is based upon field observations and is consistent with the sage grouse management plan, which also would guide a proposal to re-open the season. Population status and species biology don't support changes for other species at this time.

## **Agency Recommendation & Rationale**

FWP recommends adopting the proposed sage grouse season and all upland game bird bag limits and permit quotas, consistent with known biology, management history and survey efforts to date.

## **Proposed Motion**

I move to approve as final the 2014 sage grouse season, re-opening criteria and other upland game bird bag and possession limits and permit quotas as presented by FWP.